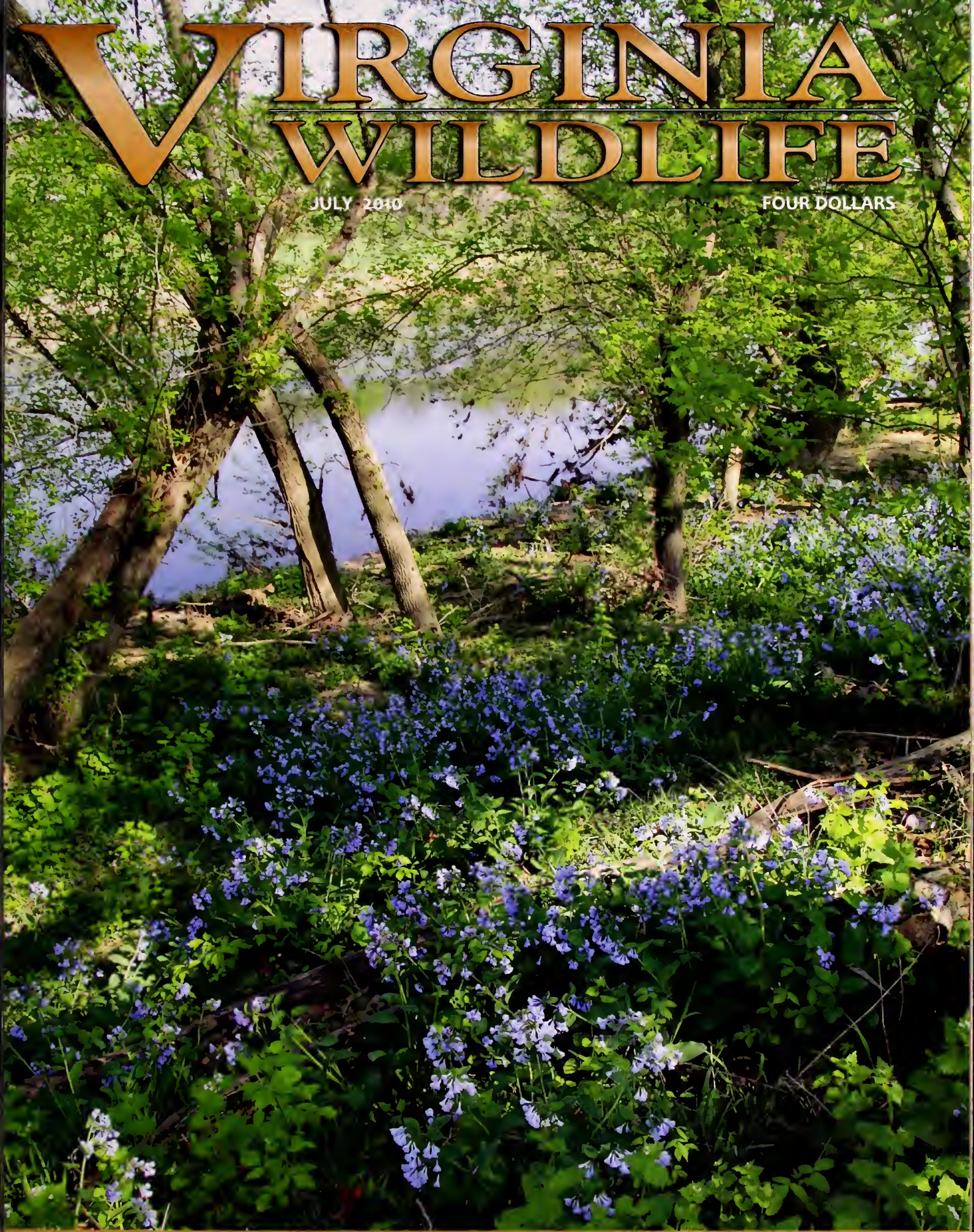
VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

JULY 2010

FOUR DOLLARS



Of Tree Stewards & Trout Streams • Legacy of the CCC • In Praise of Canebrakes

Bob Duncan
Executive Director

In this issue of *Virginia Wildlife* we celebrate the contributions of volunteers from many different backgrounds, whose boundless giving benefits a broad assortment of programs here at DGIF. King Montgomery's feature about the Complementary Work Force program (p. 16) describes a well-oiled machine and speaks to the strong level of commitment exhibited by so many of our volunteer workforce. That program is enjoying much growth and success as it wraps up four years of assistance to our Department.

Of course our agency has counted on the generous gifts of time donated by wildlife supporters since its earliest days. Historically, Virginians engaged in field surveys spanning a wide range of research topics to capture information critical to decisions made by wildlife managers. Those individuals tirelessly traversed field and thicket, trout stream and upland marsh in all sorts of weather and field conditions—much of it inhospitable—to collect invaluable data.

The force of today's DGIF volunteer army harkens back to an earlier time in this country, when people got by with the help and kindness of their extended families and neighbors. And just as we witnessed in the late 1920s and '30s, such generosity allowed our society to achieve things that could otherwise never happen. The government in collaboration with ordinary citizens formed the Civilian Conservation Corps (featured inside), and their legacy in Virginia serves as a prime example.

As I gaze across the state landscape now, I can't help but be reminded that our volunteers are everywhere! From the Complementary Work Force to assorted "friends of" groups to hunter education instructors to master naturalists, our volunteers stand "at the ready." Outreach programs serving our youth, our veterans, our disabled, and neighbors needing food are the magnificent result. Yes, volunteer energy and elbow grease make it happen.

It would be difficult, probably impossible, to quantify the impacts of such volunteer efforts. The benefits to this agency are tremendous, and like the ripple effect on the water's surface, our volunteers tend to inspire other acts of giving—thus widening the circle of beneficiaries.

To all of our volunteers, please accept my heartfelt thanks and know that every day I count our blessings, made possible because of your values and commitment to our mission.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

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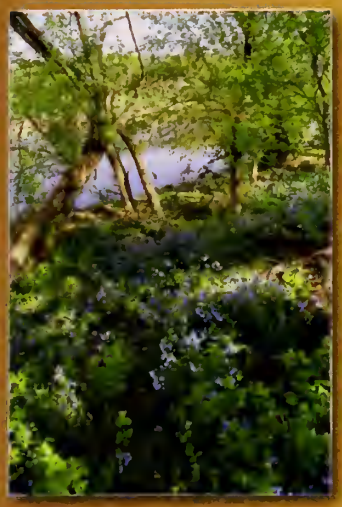

About the cover:
Virginia bluebells, *Mertensia virginica*, bloom profusely along the South Fork of the Shenandoah at Front Royal and are a highlight of the Royal Shenandoah Greenway. Greenways and riparian zones offer much needed travel corridors for wildlife seeking food, water, and an escape route from predators.
Photo ©Marie Majarov

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VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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Where The Mountains Meet The River
Tree Stewards Help a Dream Come True
ROYAL SHENANDOAH
GREENWAY

photos & story
by Marie Majarov

©Dwight Dyke

The South Fork of the Shenandoah winds its way north through the valley.

Instructor Herb Rinehart teaches the proper way to prune a tree.

The historic town of Front Royal and surrounding Warren County have long held a dream. Here, the Blue Ridge Mountains descend magnificently westward and the long and lovely Massanutten Mountain slopes gracefully eastward, creating a sheltered, rich valley where the North and South forks of the mighty Shenandoah River come together to form the meandering, famed "Oh Shenandoah." The river eventually surges into the Potomac some 60 miles farther north at Harpers Ferry. Surrounded by such splendor, the dream has been to help connect the abundant natural beauties and unique resources of the area: magnificent rivers, Happy Creek, Shenandoah National Park, area schools, and nearby Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, Northern Virginia 4-H Conference Center, and Appalachian Trail. The result is a greenway of natural areas and trails, walking and bicycle paths, and stunning views that inspire further conservation efforts and permit appropriate access, appreciation, learning, and enjoyment.

As dreams often do, this one simmered gently in the background for almost 20 years until a dedicated group of citizens, the Front Royal/Warren County (FR/WC) Tree Stewards, came together to spearhead the dream's implementation. Inspired by their strong love of walking and enjoying nature, the group seized an opportunity created by three, unrelated developments: a newly built Department (DGIF) boat ramp at the town boat landing that enables easy access to the Shenandoah; a donation of 15 acres of adjacent open land by the family of former Front Royal Mayor Jim Eastham to Warren County; and a dusted-off greenway plan called, "Where the Mountains Meet the River." They resolved: "It's time; this can be done!"

"Nothing happens unless first we dream."
–Carl Sandburg

Left, Shenandoah National Park offers a magnificent springtime view of Front Royal/Warren County, the Shenandoah River, and the mountains beyond. Above, Sandy Wilson, co-chair of the Royal Shenandoah Greenway Committee (center) and other tree stewards look over a beautiful stand of bluebells.

In existence since 1997, the FR/WC Tree Stewards are one of seven chapters of "Tree Stewards," a statewide program sponsored by the Virginia Urban Forest Council which operates under the umbrella of the state Department of Forestry (DOF). Their mission is to "enhance the quality of life through stewardship of our commonwealth's urban and community trees." FR/WC Tree Stewards are volunteers who take a series of classes, "All About Trees," in which, through classroom training and hands-on practice, they learn the basics of tree biology and physiology, identification, planting, and maintenance techniques. Additionally they make an annual commitment of 25 service hours per person to FR/WC Tree Steward projects aimed at increasing awareness of the intrinsic value and beauty of trees; caring for the community's publicly planted trees (especially young trees); and educating the public about proper tree selection, planting, and care.

Many of these citizens from all walks of life are retired. They bring to their endeavors a broad collection of skills, business acumen, artistic talents, and a deep sense of concern about the environment. They represent the collective push that got the greenway ball rolling. Under the leadership of Jim Huttar and Sandy Wilson, a conceptual master plan was commissioned by the Virginia Tech Community Design Assistance Center (a wonderful community resource). Grants were obtained and the help of the area's Beautification of Front Royal Committee, town and county leaders, and supportive local individuals and businesses were enlisted. The result: a 4.4-mile "Royal Shenandoah Greenway" is now well underway, with the first major section along the Shenandoah River to be completed this summer.

Shenandoah River Bluebells

The South Fork of the Shenandoah River, averaging about 100 feet in width, is a central component of the greenway. Beginning at the Luray Avenue Boat Landing, site of the DGIF boat ramp and Eastham Park, the greenway follows the South Fork of the Shenandoah River upstream to the south and east toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. An important north-south transportation route since Indian times, river banks in this area are lined with remnants of stone walls from days of yore when they served as the "Luray Turnpike" for delivering goods "up" to Luray and farther south in the Shenandoah Valley. (Remember, the river flows south to north and valley natives refer to "south" as "up" the valley.)

DGIF trout stocking on Happy Creek is always exciting, with many young helping hands from Trout Unlimited.

DGIF Boat Ramps

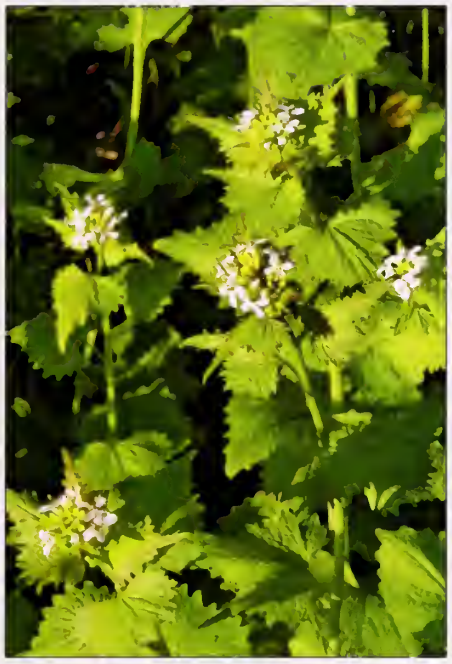
DGIF maintains 21 public boat ramp and access areas along the South Fork and main stem of the Shenandoah and another five on the river's North Fork. The U.S. Forest Service offers four additional entry locations for the public. Except for national forest and state park lands, much of the Shenandoah waterfront is privately owned, permitting quite limited public entry to its beauty and recreational opportunities.

The DGIF access points enable public enjoyment of navigable waters, primarily Class 1 rapids, and excellent fishing afforded by the Shenandoah. Spaced out along the river, DGIF public landings make it possible to pick a float trip—to launch at one point and take your canoe/boat out at another.

The Luray Avenue boat ramp and inviting surroundings represent an exceptionally impressive collaborative effort. The Department built a concrete ramp for ease of backing up trailers to launch canoes and boats; Warren County provided a convenient parking area for vehicles and trailers at the adjacent Eastham Park; and the town of Front Royal with FR/WC Tree Stewards created a picnic area enhanced with canopy shelters. Now that's partnership! Load up your canoe and enjoy.

Almost unrecognizable now as a road once bustling with wagons and commerce, it offers breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and river. Rich soil nourishes a wide variety of trees: sycamore, willow, pawpaw, and beech; wildflowers the likes of violets, phlox, spring beauties, columbine, and dutchman's breeches; and of course, butterflies flutter around host plants. Overhead, bald eagles and ospreys can be spotted, as their nests are not far away. A variety of ducks and shorebirds frequently make fancy fly-in landings on the river to take advantage of tasty insects and vegetation while kingfishers perch overhead.

Most spectacular is a dazzling stand of native, spring blooming Virginia bluebells, *Mertensia virginica*. Blue blossoms stretch farther than you can see as you look along the river. It is a perfect place for a conservation-conscious greenway path, and the tree stewards, many of whom are also master gardeners, are passionate conservationists and advocates for all things native.



Garlic mustard, Alliaria petiolata, *is a prodigious invasive and hard to eliminate. Pull it when you see it!*

The bluebells provide a touching example of tree steward environmental caring. Recognizing that the planned greenway would go right through the assemblage of Virginia bluebells, tree steward Emily Huttar took on the laborious task of transplanting those that were in harm's way and enlisted numerous stewards as well as master gardeners and master naturalists to carefully transplant the bluebells to areas along the path where they would not get trampled—ensuring their preservation, beauty, and vast presence in this riparian zone.

Working with the bluebells sounded another environmental alarm: garlic mustard, *Alliaria petiolata*, a prodigious invasive that swiftly crowds out native treasures. And so the pulling began... and continues, to protect this vital habitat. Conservation is an ongoing commitment!

Happy Creek

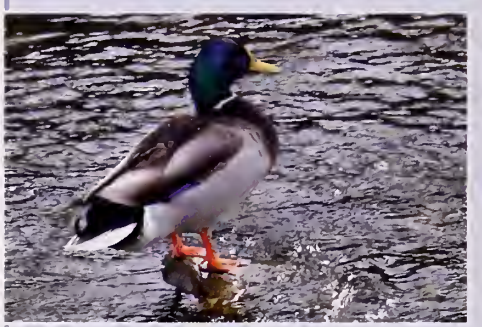
Happy Creek, a fast moving urban trout stream and tributary of the Shenandoah, rambles delightfully through the town of Front Royal and adds another natural element of beauty and rich resources to the Royal Shenandoah Greenway. Stocked by DGIF for yearly "Kids Fishing Day" activities, Happy Creek is itself a story of major conservation effort and success.

A day prior to the annual Trout Unlimited Kids Fishing Day, Alexis Carter and her dad get the honor of stocking the first fish at the DGIF trout stocking.

Tree steward and greenway co-chair Jim Huttar and wife Emily, also a tree steward, transplant bluebells.

In 2008, DGIF, collaborating with numerous organizations such as Trout Unlimited, the Tree Stewards, the Town of Front Royal, Boy Scouts, Garden Clubs, and the DOF, undertook to rescue this stream from severe ongoing environmental degradation. Preserving trout streams is a major DGIF goal throughout the commonwealth. DGIF Fisheries Biologist Larry Mohn expertly constructed

DGIF biologists carefully placed rock vane structures along Happy Creek at the arboretum to protect this trout stream for future generations of fishermen to enjoy. Left, a mallard (and Happy Creek resident) enjoys some morning sun.



For More Information

- On Tree Stewards and Becoming a Tree Steward

  Front Royal Tree Stewards:
  www.treesfrontroyal.org

  Virginia Department of Forestry, Urban and Community Forestry:
  www.dof.virginia.gov/urban/index.shtml

  Virginia Urban Forest Council:
  www.treesvirginia.org

- Fishing and Boating on the Shenandoah River and Happy Creek

  Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries:
  www.dgif.virginia.gov

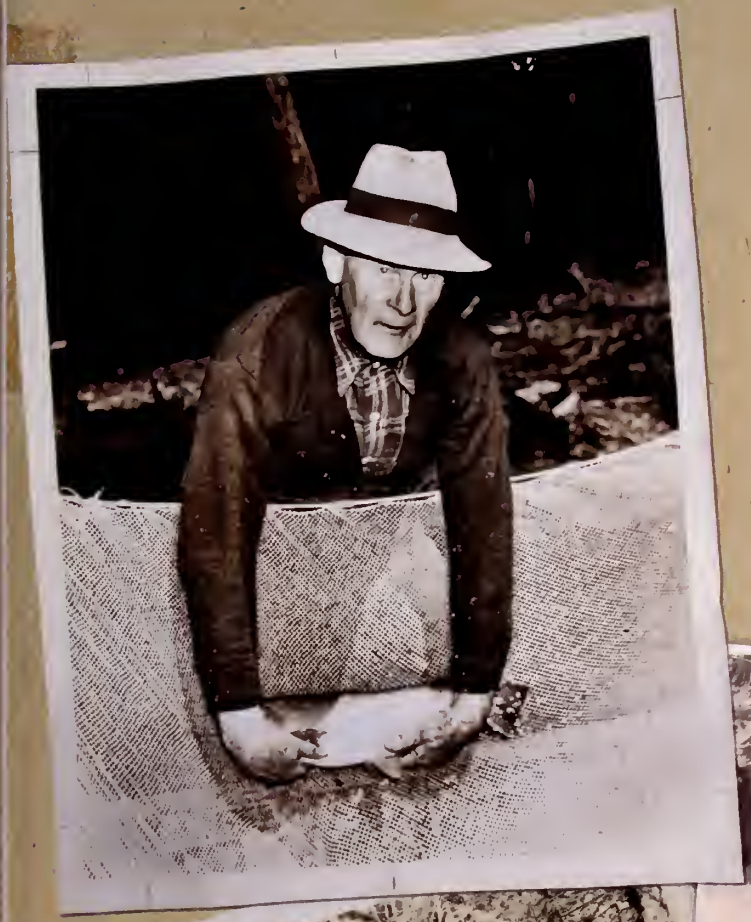
rock vanes—structures of large rocks placed at angles to deflect currents and erosional forces from destabilizing the stream's banks. Doing so offers flood protection to the riparian buffer and creates pools, termed scour pools, that enhance wildlife habitat. With safer stream banks, trout fishing opportunities will be excellent for many decades to come.

Along the banks of this coldwater fishery, the tree stewards maintain an active arboretum with native Virginia trees, each meticulously labeled and maintained: witchhazel, sweetbay magnolia, scarlet oak, American elder, red spruce, redbud, green hawthorne, serviceberry, Carolina silverbell, fringetree, sycamore, and black gum, to name but a few. A walking path features attractive benches and plantings of spring bulbs—a pleasant venue for sitting and enjoying the babbling sounds of Happy Creek and surrounding beauty.

Cooperative greenway efforts such as the Royal Shenandoah Greenway do more than simply connect various geographical locations. They connect people to nature and afford important opportunities to increase buffers along river landscapes and open corridors for movement so essential to effective wildlife conservation. It takes a lot of effort, commitment, and plain old hard work on the part of many individuals and collaborating organizations. But as the Front Royal Tree Stewards demonstrate: It can be done. Dreams do come true. □

Marie and Milan Majarov (www.majarov.com) are clinical psychologists, nature enthusiasts, and members of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association who live in Winchester.

The Lasting Legacy of the CCC



Virginia's Fish Hatcheries

"I propose to create a Civilian Conservation Corps... More important, however, than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work."

Franklin D. Roosevelt,
March 9, 1933

by Emily M. Grey

In 1933, FDR began the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to alleviate unemployment during the Depression and to foster environmental stewardship. Using local construction materials and methods, young men worked on many conservation projects such as maintaining parks and forests, as well as fighting fires.

These committed workers received food, shelter, education, and a $30 per month stipend which saved many of their families from hunger in tough times. Virtually every state benefited from millions of acres of federal and state land improvements, new roads, strung telephone lines, and planted trees. With 53 and 91 camps at a given time, Virginia was the fifth highest recipient of CCC funds.

"The CCC is everywhere around us here in Virginia," says Joan Sharpe, President of CCC Legacy in Edinburg. "As I speak to people across the state and the nation, most aren't aware of the CCC even though the first camp in the nation is right here in Shenandoah County."

The CCC Fish Culture Legacy

From 1933 to 1942, the CCC (known as "Roosevelt's Tree Army") constructed four fish culture stations or hatcheries at Front Royal, King and Queen, Marion, and Montebello. This involved routing a water source (a dam or spring) and digging ponds and raceways with earthen banks or wooden siding to control water flow. One or more buildings were used for incubation and rearing young fish.

Presently, the Department's Fisheries Division operates nine fish culture stations (categorized as either "rearing stations" or "hatcheries") throughout the state.

"Hatcheries have always played an important role in the Department's mission," explains David Whitehurst, director of the Bureau of Wildlife Resources. "Not only do they produce a wide variety of sport fish for recreational fishing, the state's public hatcheries have been instrumental in the restoration of depleted fish populations such as the striped bass and American shad.

"Another very important role in recent years has been the propagation of threatened and endangered aquatic species for re-establishing populations in waters where they have become nearly extinct."

Four warmwater facilities hatch and rear species such as muskellunge, northern pike, striped bass, walleyes, catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, and redear sunfish. These stations provide two to five million fish for annual stocking in Virginia waters and produce 10 to 15 million striped bass for trading with 15 other states.

Five coldwater facilities are engaged entirely in trout production, from hatching to raising to stocking. Over a million trout are reared to stocking size each year.

The Front Royal Fish Culture Station

Constructed in 1836, Wakeman's Mill was dismantled circa 1930 from this site and moved to Mt. Vernon. The commonwealth soon purchased the property, and the CCC commenced building this earliest state-owned hatchery.

A 2002 Virginia CCC Fish Hatchery Survey found this venue to be a contributing historic resource and recommended Front Royal Fish

All images courtesy of Clarence Thomas Cash, from his personal collection. Our deep appreciation is extended to C.T. Cash for sharing his pictures with us.

Culture Station for nomination to the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places. A dam, 27 ponds, a raceway system, cemetery, three buildings, and a swale from the mill comprise the 108-acre complex in Warren County. Much of the underground cypress piping remains intact.

This warmwater hatchery produces and stocks fingerling size walleyes, smallmouth bass, muskellunge, northern pike, and catchable (9- to 11-inch) trout. It is also a distribution point for trout, catfish, and other species to the waters of northern and northwestern Virginia. More than 140,000 fish were stocked from the facility in 2009.

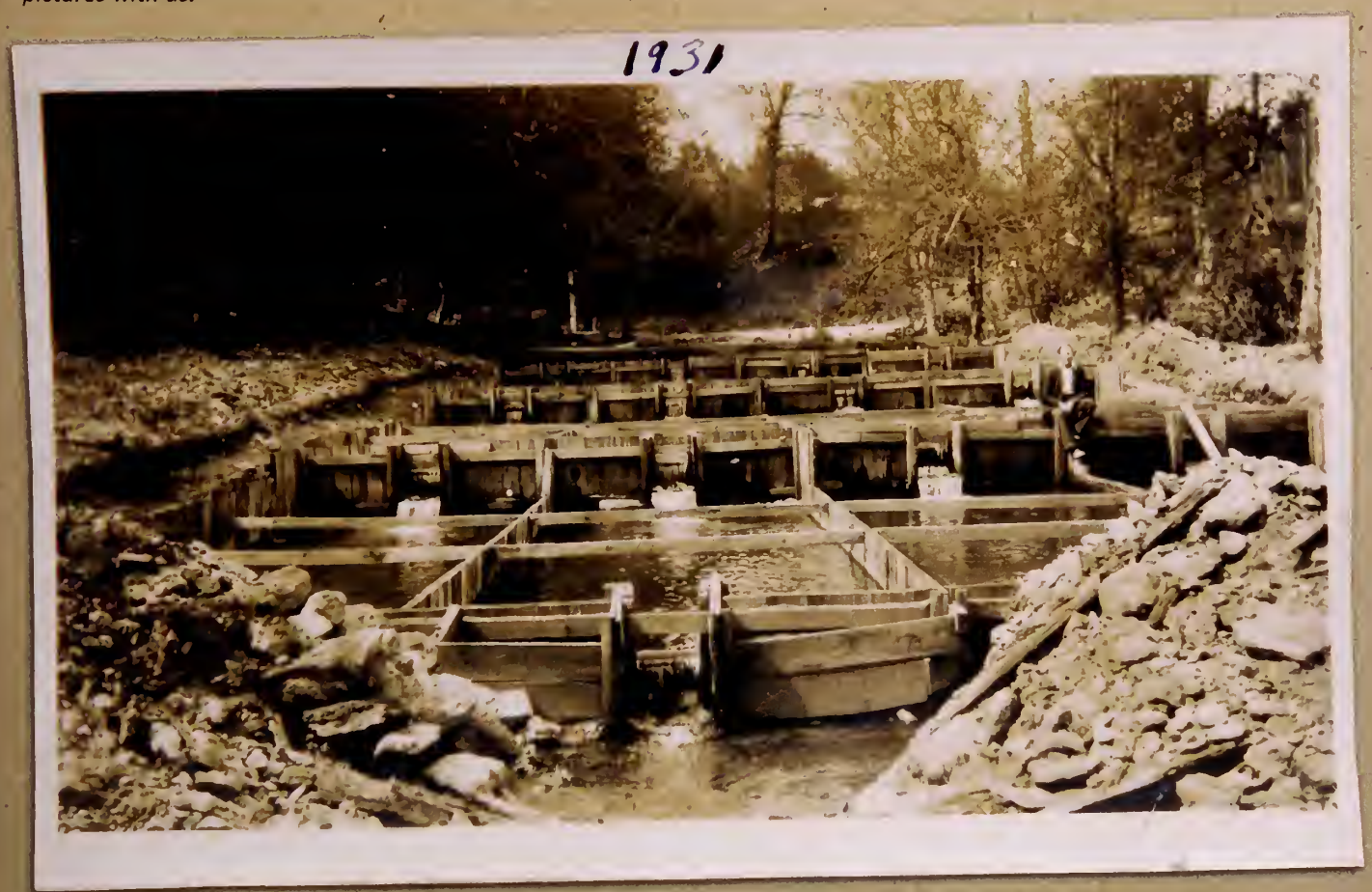
The King and Queen Fish Culture Station

In 1936, local CCC labor moved earth, restructured a dam, and diverted a stream to construct ponds at this eastern Virginia venue. With the successful storage and breeding of largemouth bass, bream, crappie, and pike, this warmwater hatchery expanded in 1942.

The 42-acre complex of 25 ponds, seven buildings, and one raceway system was determined to be a noncontributing historic resource. Rich in other ways, this hatchery produces and stocks fingerling size (1- to 3-inch) walleye, striped bass, largemouth bass, fathead minnows, bluegill, and redear sunfish.

As part of a restoration program in the James, Rappahannock, and Pamunkey rivers over the past several years, King & Queen staff hatched out and stocked millions of American shad. The hatchery was completely renovated in 2006 and stocked 1.2 million fingerlings in 2009.

Striped bass hatched at this facility originated from fish taken from the Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers. These specimens are stocked in lakes throughout the Chesapeake Bay drainage. American shad captured



"Our position is that all of the work of the CCC boys is important whether you were building a latrine, fighting mosquitoes, working in a tree nursery, rearing fish, or building a scenic highway visited by millions," says Joan Sharpe. "Virginia would be a very different place without the CCC and yet few know."

A Welcomed Lifeline

Nearly 80 years since FDR's CCC program, our nation finds itself in a similar boat with a challenging economy and fragile environment.

Like the legendary CCC of the 1930s, a recently established Corps Network serves as an umbrella group for 113 modern corps organizations across the nation. Based in Washington, D.C., this entity offers young men and women an opportunity to change their communities through meaningful service. Modern corps efforts often provide a lifeline to low-income, out-of-school, out-of-work people, looking for a second chance.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery in Charles City will receive $175,000 funding as part of the ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009). The money will be used for crucial repairs to a water-supply system for a hatchery initiated during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

On a former part of Berkeley Plantation, this 440-acre hatchery was created during the Depression with a water-supply system dating to the late 18th century. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still uses water from the lake to help stock Virginia's rivers with American shad, nurse a fledgling sturgeon fishery, and restore endangered mussels to state tributaries.

from the Pamunkey and Potomac rivers are used to produce fish for the restoration of James and Rappahannock river populations.

Off State Route 14 (named The Trail) near Stevensville, the King and Queen Fish Culture Station also features a hiking and nature trail and is open for tours.

The Fish Culture Station at Marion

Begun circa 1935 in Smyth County, this is the oldest of Virginia's trout culture facilities. Though this cold-water hatchery's earliest wooden structures are gone, a vibrant 1939 hatchery building hosts water flow from unique aeration fountains to dam- and spring-fed raceways on the opposite side.

Around 100,000 gallons of natural spring water contain nearly two million fish. More than 400,000 spawned, hatched, and reared rainbow, brook, and brown trout are released in numerous state ponds in ten surrounding counties in Southwest Virginia or transported to other stations.

This ten-acre property's aeration fountain structure, dam, nine ponds, raceway system, and nine buildings did not meet the criteria of a historic resource. However, the main brick hatchery building, aeration fountains, associated ponds, and manager's house were deemed worthy of retention and preservation.

The Montebello Fish Hatchery

There were originally no buildings at this hillside hatchery started in the 1930s. Pitched raceway roofs and the wooded setting helped keep the water cool.

Formerly, the downhill raceway contained 52 separate pens. After upland pens were reinforced with concrete in the 1940s, the lower section was abandoned. In time, adjacent land was annexed and additional buildings were acquired and constructed. Original stone and concrete sides remain.

From the 1930s until its purchase in the 1970s, the Department leased this formerly private, commercial hatchery. About 60,000 pounds of brook, rainbow, and brown trout are grown each year at Montebello from fingerlings supplied by other hatcheries. No spawning activity occurs here.

During 2001, this smallest hatchery produced over 166,000 catchable size trout. All are reared in 33 outdoor raceways, supplied with water mainly from on-site springs and nearby Mill Creek. Montebello trout go to all the trout waters east of the Blue Ridge, from Amherst County northward.

Like the Marion facility, this approximately eight-acre complex in Nelson County did not qualify as a historic resource. Character-defining features meriting retention and preservation are the source pond, raceway path, and accumulated small-scale buildings on the site.

Just off the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Trail, and George Washington National Forest, Montebello is the most visited facility. This hatchery stocks trout in nine counties and five urban fishing lakes in and near Richmond and Northern Virginia. In fact, it is the main source of trout for Virginia's urban fishing program, entirely in the eastern half of the state. Last year, 154,592 trout were stocked into public waters from Montebello.

Marion, King & Queen, and Montebello fish culture stations are also designated sites on the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail.

"A new state record blue catfish was caught in May of 2009," says Ron Southwick, DGIF Fisheries Division Assistant Director. "It weighed just over 102 pounds and is the first freshwater fish over 100 pounds caught in Virginia." □

Emily M. Grey is a writer, photographer, naturalist, and attorney from Virginia's Eastern Shore. Her passions are nature, traveling, and interacting with varied cultures.

For More Information

DGIF Fish Hatcheries
www.HuntFishVA.com/fishing/stocking/hatcheries.asp

Civilian Conservation Corps
www.ccclegacy.org

The CCC Legacy
www.corpsnetwork.org
Works with the Corps Network to support current corps projects that help improve CCC-developed lands.

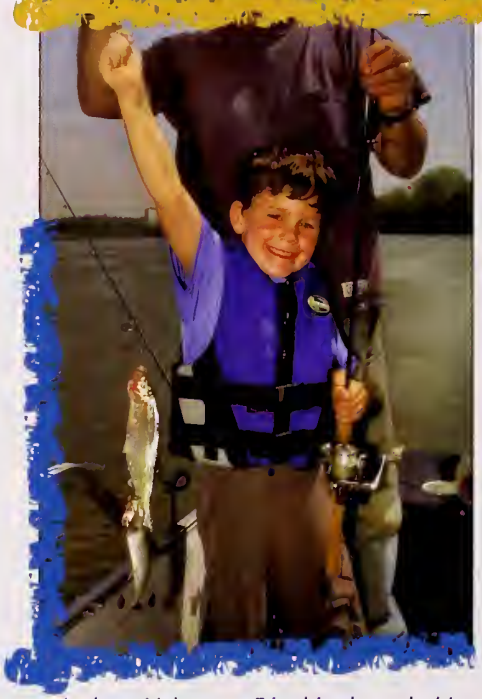
Give the Gift of Fishing

Abigail Fischer, age 9 in this photo, holds the biggest fish she ever caught, a 36-lb. blue catfish from the James River in downtown Richmond. "My favorite thing about fishing is when I know I have a fish on the line and am about to reel it in... I'm excited to see how big it is!"

Photo-essay by Lynda Richardson and Capt. Mike Ostrander

One of the nicest things about having a passion is sharing it with others. One of my passions is fishing. When I was very young my dad, a die-hard fisherman his entire life, took me fishing. I always looked forward to our trips together and to this day I fondly remember my fascination with the colorful lures in his tackle boxes, Coke and peanut butter cracker snacks, filling my hip waders with cold trout stream water when I fell in (well, maybe that wasn't a fond memory), and the pride I felt at making a great cast and sometimes bringing in an even bigger fish than my dad. (He might argue that point!)

Because my dad shared his passion for fishing with me, today I'm a die-hard angler myself. I look for any excuse to fish, but now my vision of where and how to do so has greatly expanded. In the Amazon River in Peru, for example, I used a plain old stick with a little fishing line and hunks of meat on the end to capture red-bellied piranha. After several photography assignments to Alaska, I went back to fish for halibut and salmon on the Kenai Peninsula. I have even fished while on an assignment when I covered a fly-fishing story for the Nature Conservancy in Belize.



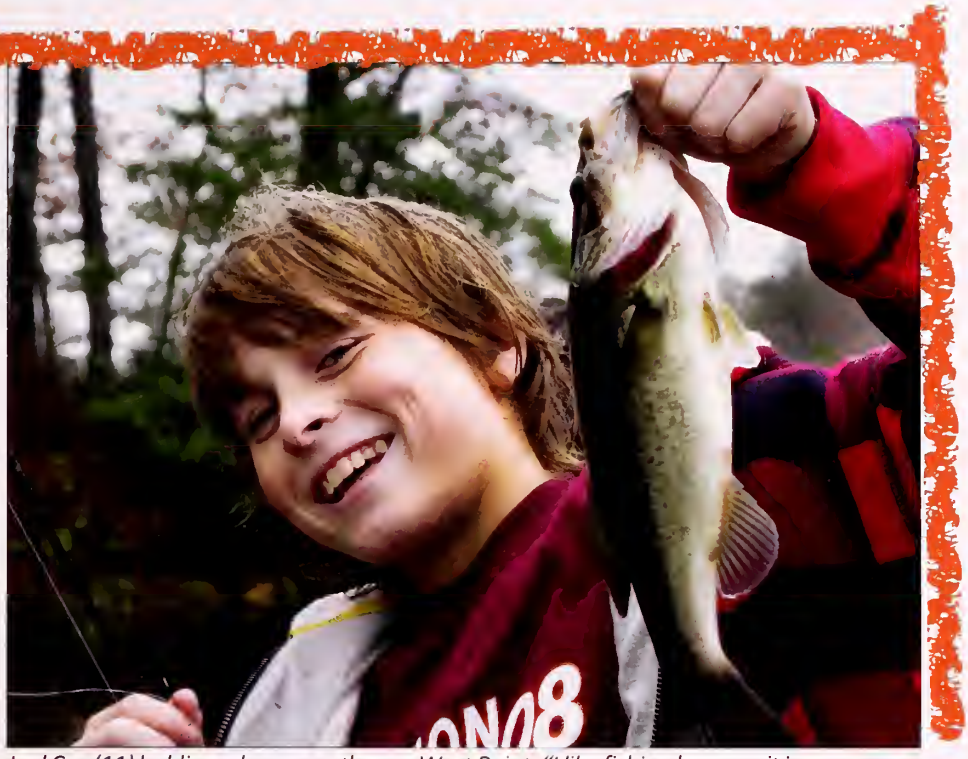
Jackson Velzy, age 5 in this photo, holding up a herring he caught in downtown Richmond. "I get excited just knowing that I might be able to catch a fish!"

I would have to say that the gift of fishing is one of the best presents I ever received. It is a gift that keeps on giving for the rest of your life.

Because of the challenges faced by young people today, I feel that it is more important than ever to share the gift of fishing. Children across the country are spending less time outdoors and more time sitting in front of a television or a computer—creating in them a tremendous disconnect to the natural world. What would be better than fishing to get kids outside enjoying a little sun on their faces, forgetting life's worries, and sharing great times with family and friends? By doing so, you will give them the tools to create fun and memorable experiences they will appreciate for the rest of their lives.

It sure worked for me. Thanks Dad!!! □

Lynda Richardson is a full-time photojournalist. Her husband, Capt. Mike Ostrander, is a well-known James River fishing and eagle tour guide.



Joel Cox (11) holding a largemouth near West Point. "I like fishing because it is so peaceful. I like to fish by myself in remote places and sneak through bushes to get to the fish."

Nick Boston (12) on the lower James with the biggest fish he's ever caught, a blue cat. "Out of all my days fishing, this was the mother of all catches!"

Left to right, Caroline (8) and Eva Tyler (11) and Sasha Savenko (11), ages when this photo was taken, hold a small channel cat caught during a kids fishing event at Westover Plantation along the James River. Caroline, "This was my first time fishing, and yeah, I would do it again. It was fun!" Eva, "My favorite thing about fishing is touching the fish—seeing the fins and stuff. It felt slimy and cool!"

July 17th through August 15th is National Fishing Month.

GIVING SOMETHING

The many dimensions of our complementary work force

photos & story
by King Montgomery

Have you ever wanted to stock trout in a stream or lake, test deer tissue samples for chronic wasting disease, staff a Department (DGIF) display booth at an outdoors show or other event, be a shooting range attendant, help restore wildlife habitat, work in a fish hatchery, or do clerical or field work in a regional office?

Okay, and if you can answer "yes" to one or more of the following questions, you could become a member of the Department's Complementary Work Force (CWF):

- → Do you love the outdoors?
- → Would you like to "give back" to Virginia's fisheries and wildlife resources?
- → Do you like to interact with others who share your interests, and teach those who want to learn about Virginia's natural resources?
- → Do you want to make a difference?

The Program

In the tough economy we've all faced these past several years, it's difficult for DGIF to hire more qualified people, even though the Department's mission and reach keep expanding. To help mitigate the budget situation, and to assist employees, the CWF was begun almost three years ago.

The CWF uses trained part-time volunteers and interns to help the Department accomplish its mission. These citizen volunteers give their time and talents to augment and enhance the efforts of the Department's professional, technical, and administrative staff.

Led by CWF State Coordinator Susan Alger, a former game warden, pilot programs were initiated in DGIF Regions 1 and 5, and in Region 4 for trout stocking only. The CWF became an almost immediate success and since has expanded fully into Region 4, with plans to soon cover the entire state.

As we entered 2010, there were over 230 active CWF volunteers and almost 350 pending applications! Some people signed up from regions not yet participating, hoping to be first in line when the opportunity arises.

The Genesis

By late 2006, Susan Alger had been a game warden, one of the first women to hold that position, for 27 years. She suggested the DGIF have a cadre of volunteers to help full-time employees in offices and in the field by performing routine and time-consuming tasks. Her proposal

Children learn about the fishes in the nearby creek by seeing and touching them. CWF volunteer Tim Hall teaches the kids about the fish and the ecosystem in which they live. The fish are kept in an aquarium and released after the event.

BACK

GAME AND INLAND FISHERIES

VOLUNTEER

Future fisheries biologists look on.

was accepted and she was asked to organize, recruit, and lead what came to be known as the Complementary Work Force.

These volunteers never would replace employees, but rather, would allow employees to focus on core job responsibilities by handling the many other activities that can detract from the primary mission. The volunteers truly are a work force multiplier and the synergy of their efforts, combined with their professionalism, makes the Department more efficient.

What's to Do

One example of the many activities to perform in the CWF involves participating in an ongoing Virginia Tech/DGIF program for a year-long data gathering project in the Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). The "Wildlife Management Area and Range User Survey" collects information on frequency of visits; activities pursued while visiting the WMAs; suggestions from visitors for improving service and access; and user feedback on current fish, game and non-game wildlife, and land management techniques and objectives.

Most of the data are collected by CWF volunteers in ten WMAs and range sites statewide. Four hundred and sixty surveys were collected on opening day of dove season in September, 2009, and 375 surveys were recorded for archery deer season on October 3rd that year. The information collected is used to influence planning and resources management for the WMAs and ranges.

And there is, of course, much more that volunteers can do. For a list of some of these other opportunities, see the web link provided at the end of this article.

CWF Volunteer Sampler

John Gibbons, a CWF volunteer from Oakton, holds degrees in accounting and in business management. He's a program manager for the federal government, and he loves hunting and fishing. Deer hunting is his passion.

"I joined the CWF to learn more about deer herd management and to participate in the writing of deer kill permits. As I learned more about the CWF, I realized that I can also perform volunteer tasks supporting a second interest of mine, aquaculture, by working at a fish hatchery. The more I learn about the organization, the more I plan to do with CWF.

CWF volunteer Kyle Alger, son of CWF State Coordinator Susan Alger, teaches a youngster not to be afraid of snakes, but to be respectful.

VDGIF Fisheries Technician Patrick Snellings assisted by CWF volunteer Tim Hall shock up fish for children and other visitors to see at Herndon's 2009 NatureFest.

Another benefit I receive from CWF volunteer efforts is learning more about the outdoors and resource management from an agency point of view. Yet another benefit is the intrinsic value I receive through volunteering. Virginia does a fine job in providing opportunities for its citizens to enjoy the outdoors. Over the years, DGIF staff have made a favorable impression on my family through a variety of outdoors programs. It is my duty to return the favor."

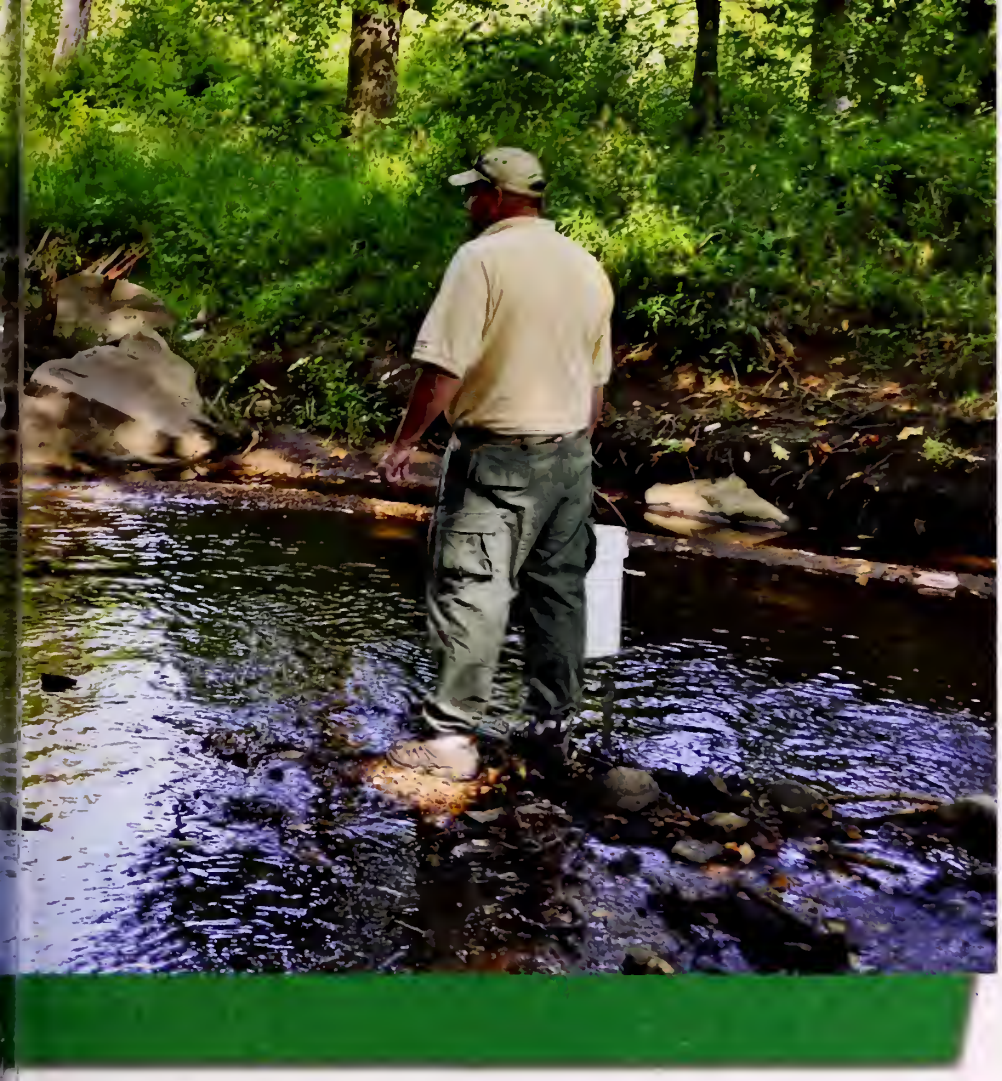
Kyla Knudson is a Region 5 volunteer with a degree in natural resources management, who works in the hotel arena. Originally from Calgary in Alberta, Canada, she now lives in Fairfax City. Watching her work the DGIF booth at Herndon's *NatureFest* in September 2009, she is both knowledgeable and personable when dealing with the public, and is very good with children. Kyla also worked at the Wildlife Management Area Survey, including during opening day of dove season in the fall, 2009.

"I had a blast at the Phelps WMA survey on Saturday," she says. It's nice seeing people having fun when performing valuable volunteer service.

Charlottesville's Hugh Nix trained to issue deer kill permits to landowners who experience deer damage on their property and issues these permits in and around Albemarle County. He also mans DGIF booths at various events and helped young people participating in the National Archery in the Schools Program—including the tournament held in Fisherville in 2009. Hugh is a retired Fairfax County Police lieutenant and later retired from Northrop Grumman as manager of security investigations.

Tim Hall works in the automobile refinishing business and has been an avid hunter and dedicated angler since childhood. "I joined the CWF program because it's my way to give back to what I have enjoyed my whole life and maybe something I

CWF volunteer Ed Clarke, a professional entomologist, instructs visitors about the insect life in Runnymede Park.



do will protect or even make outdoor experiences better for our future generations. I really deeply love everything I have done with the CWF—from writing deer damage permits, to working with kids trying to catch fish, to the National Archery in the Schools Program tournament. I've also spent time helping with chronic wasting disease testing in the field."

CWF volunteer Kyla Knudson teaches an enthusiastic audience.

I've seen Tim work with small children, showing them various fishes that were shocked up from a nearby stream. When he gets a crowd, he'll reach in the aquarium and grab a fish, and let the kids quickly and gently touch it before it goes back into the water. The squeals of delight speak for themselves.

Hall says, "This program is awesome and I encourage anyone that feels the urge to give back to sign up—you won't regret it. When I see a 5-year-old child catch their first fish, I feel like I caught that fish. *No better feeling.*"

Volunteering can pose challenges: finding time in life for the extra commitment, and having to take directions when many volunteers, professionals in their own right, are used to calling the shots. But new experiences are broadening. Motivated, capable people always are welcomed, whether in the CWF or the traditional workforce. Especially as some folks defer retirement or other career opportunities due to financial uncertainties, the ability to pursue one's passion takes on new meaning and new rewards.

State Coordinator Susan Alger has now retired after 30 years of service with the DGIF, and she plans to continue to volunteer in her community. "I've been a volunteer my whole life," she says, "so I recognize in CWF volunteers the same sentiment I've always felt—the desire to give something back, to make things better for those who come after me—to help others."

Alger may be retired, but her legacy lives on in the Complementary Work Force Program she conceived, implemented, and led for three years. Retired doesn't mean inactive. She says, "I'm not ready to stop contributing to my community. It's just part of who I am."

With volunteers like those described here, and the many others in the CWF, and a leader of Susan Alger's caliber, it is no wonder that this fine program has become such a success in the Old Dominion. □

Longtime contributor King Montgomery is a well-known outdoor writer and photographer. His works have been featured in many publications. Contact him at kingangler1@aol.com.

Contact Us

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Complementary Work Force Program

Call 804-322-9529 or go to: www.dgif.virginia.gov/volunteer.

CWF information, application forms, and newsletters are all online.

THE Canebrake Rattlesnake STORY

story & photos by Gail Brown

PAYING RESPECT TO A MUCH MALIGNED REPTILE INVOLVES DEDICATION.

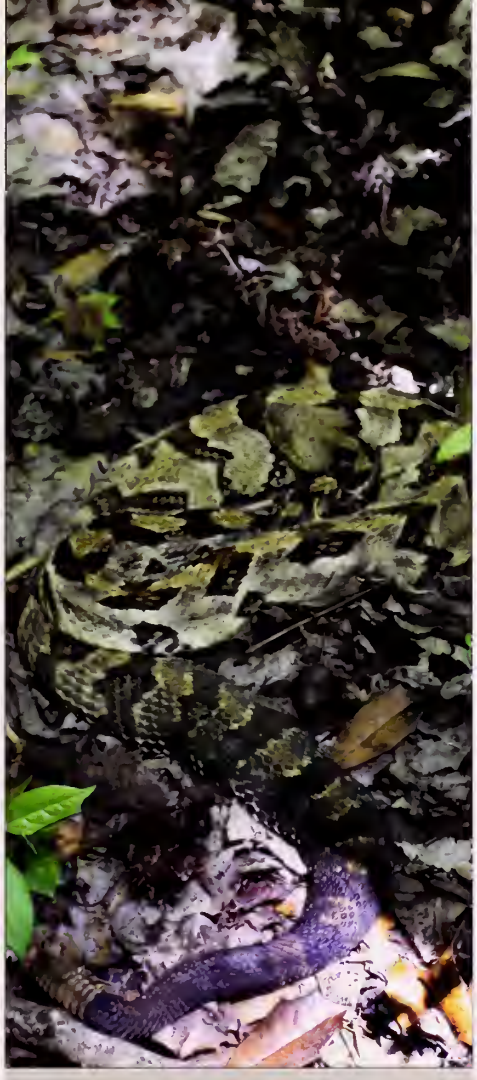
The Department of the Navy may own Naval Support Activity Northwest Annex (NSA NWA) in Chesapeake, but it's the mosquitoes, greenbrier, reptiles, and ticks that rule the land. "The mosquitoes were aggressive…the bears mostly curious…But it was the ticks that really got to me. I would be covered from head to toe with tiny 'seed' ticks. When I got home I'd sit watching TV, get some tape and pull them off by the hundreds. It got so bad my friends wouldn't ride in my car," says former field technician Chris Petersen.

Hacking through the thickets of the Great Dismal Swamp is not for the faint of heart. So why would anyone do so? The answer lies hidden in the leaf litter, coiled in ambush by fallen and standing trees, or, as Petersen once discovered, sunning on an oak branch just overhead. There,

like a bored sentry considering an uninvited guest, *Crotalus horridus* tracked Petersen with idle detachment. Determining no threat from the interloper, the canebrake rattlesnake shifted his attention elsewhere.

That the two previously crossed paths in the herpetology lab at Old Dominion University (ODU), and that the receiver held by Petersen—a divining rod to the radio transmitter implanted in the canebrake—brought the two together again meant nothing to the reptile. But to all others involved with the Old Dominion Canebrake Rattlesnake Project, locating specific canebrakes in the 3,661 acres of lowland forest on the annex, it meant opportunity: opportunity to use radiotelemetry to gather data about the canebrake population, which in Virginia is limited to the Lower Peninsula (York-James)—specifically, Isle of Wight County and Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach. Although no longer listed as a sub-species of the timber rattlesnake, the Department does recognize the canebrake as "a unique population worthy of protection as a state endangered species."

To that end, the Old Dominion Canebrake Rattlesnake Project, under the direction of Dr. Alan H. Savitzky, Department of Biological Sciences, began at the Northwest River Park in 1992. Monitoring continued at the park until 1995 when the project was moved to NSA NWA. There, partnering with the Department of the Navy and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the ODU study continued until 2007. Today work still continues on a limited basis because of the dedication of the individuals involved.



Canebrakes are not aggressive. For protection, they blend into their surroundings.

Historically, Benjamin Franklin brought the canebrake to prominence when he declared the rattlesnake the perfect symbol for America, saying, "She never begins an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrenders: She is therefore an emblem of magnanimity and true courage...she never wounds 'till she has generously given notice, even to her enemy..." During the American Revolution it was the rattlesnake, on a red and white striped background with the warning "Don't Tread on Me" that made one of our first flags—the Navy Jack—a symbol of defiance, strength, and military power.

Yet, somehow the tides turned and decades of misinformation find the canebrake persecuted for what it is not. Today it is the canebrake under attack and the Navy providing support. But as in the fable of the mouse that pulls a thorn from the mighty lion's paw, the canebrake has a powerful friend with a long memory. "The Navy has been an outstanding partner in this project," states Savitzky. "They have a very enlightened attitude about conservation of our natural resources." So much was learned because of this partnership; yet, the critical question that eludes all scientific studies involving endangered animals and man remains as cryptic today as the canebrake itself. Here is how the study unfolded:

Once captured, the snakes were brought to the lab and implanted with a radio transmitter and a passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag.

Surgeries were conducted in the herpetology lab at Old Dominion University.

Animals were implanted with temperature sensitive radio transmitters and PIT tags.

(All additional canebrakes captured in the field were also imbedded with PIT tags, as doing so helps provide information about population size.) Following surgery all snakes were released at the site of relocation within 24–48 hours. They were located again through the use of a hand-held receiver. Each time a snake was located, data on environmental conditions at the site, as well as on specific behaviors—such as shedding, courtship, and feeding—were documented. Fecal samples analyzed indicate that gray squirrels are their primary source of food. The spot of capture was marked with a flag so that the site could later be recorded with a GPS receiver. Since the locations of the snakes were documented, distances traveled by specific snakes during the various seasons could be determined. The studies showed that male canebrakes require a range of approximately 224 acres, two to three times as much area as females, with males traveling the greatest distances during mating season in late summer and early fall. This indicates the need for large, contiguous, undeveloped areas of land—a habitat requirement not easily met in southeastern Virginia.

The land at the annex is primarily lowland forest with a thick understory, but documentation indicates the canebrakes were most often located in a deciduous forest area on-site. It appears canebrakes prefer to stay in a forested habitat except when shedding or giving birth; at that time they seek the warmth of clearcuts. That, however, leaves them open to interaction with people and danger. The study showed canebrakes most often hibernate alone in root tunnels, whereas mountain rattlesnakes (commonly referred to as timber rattlesnakes) hibernate in large masses in dens. "It is very important for us to find out where they hibernate," states Savitzky. "A canebrake might go to the same place for years and years and then all of a sudden make a change. We do not understand why."

When Hurricane Isabel struck in 2003, trees were toppled, the forest canopy was torn open, and extensive coarse woody debris was created. This changed the environment at NSA NWA and affected the life patterns of the canebrake. "Hurricane Isabel offered an almost unheard of opportunity to compare data collected in the same location, on the same animals, under uniquely different conditions," states Wildlife Diversity Biologist/Herpetologist John (JD) Kleopfer.

Left, animals anesthetized for surgery were implanted within 24 hours of capture. Most were released within 24 hours post-surgery.

Canebrakes are relocated by means of a handheld receiver and directional antenna. Information about the snake and environmental conditions are recorded.

"Following the hurricane, the openings in the forest canopy warmed the forest floor and it was found that the snakes stayed closer to their hibernacula. It appears these natural openings in the forest canopy are an important habitat requirement of the snakes."

By 2007, 13,895 observations on 47 individual snakes had been completed. During the NSA NWA study, the movements of up to 16 snakes a day were tracked for 6 days a week in the summer and 3 days a week in the winter. Of all the data collected, the shared observations about the canebrake's temperament are most stunning. Former field technician Scott Goetz states, "They have a certain confidence about them…you feel like the last thing they want to do is bite…they'd rather just let you walk on by. It's so unfair that they have been so demonized."

"The snakes rely on their ability to remain cryptic," states Savitzky, "even if closely approached they are not aggressive. They act totally differently in captivity and when they are on the move…then, you don't want to mess with them; otherwise, they are extremely calm." All agree that when found in a coiled position it is easy to just scoop them up with a snake hook and put them in a bag for study. They are that gentle.

While the study holds much hope for conservation efforts, habitat loss and human predation continue to decimate Virginia's canebrake population. Perhaps that we have *any* at all is a small miracle: Canebrakes have been completely extirpated from Ontario, Canada, Rhode Island, and Maine. "Because of the lack of habitat, delisting is unlikely," states Kleopfer. "The best we can hope for is downgrading the canebrake's status to threatened." Compounding the effects of habitat loss, canebrakes—always the villains in tall tales and scary movies—continue to pay the price for Hollywood hype.

Root tunnels are typical hibernation sites for canebrakes.

Transmitters are replaced after approximately two years.

Yet science has trumped fiction time and again, and now that we have a conservation plan with guidelines for law enforcement and education, there is reason for hope. Legislation or not, however, it is our unpredictable actions that will decide the fate of the canebrake. "People may wonder why we need these snakes," states Kleopfer. "In truth, if they go the way of the [native] buffalo, mountain lion, and elk, things will probably still go on, but each time we lose a species we lose part of who we are. The critical question is: How many species can we afford to lose? When does it make a difference?"

The answer, like the canebrake, won't be easy to find.

Yet, clues to the bigger picture exist. Consider this: In the void that followed 9/11, the Secretary of the Navy directed all Navy ships to fly the First Navy Jack for the duration of the global war on terrorism. Seeing those red and white stripes with the words "Don't Tread on Me" and the canebrake stretched out in motion fills a need and pulls us together. It's like one of our leaders simply reached back into our collective history to find what we needed—a living touchstone to help us through a painful time.

Gail Brown is a retired teacher and school administrator.

Special Love

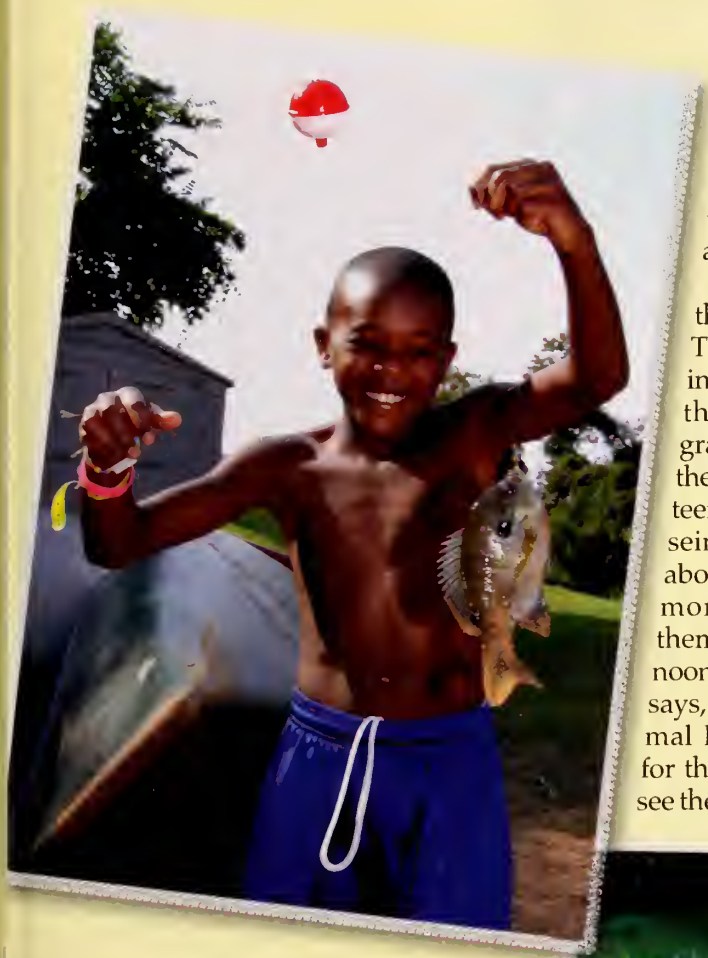
Essay by Tee Clarkson

Unfortunately it is often the seriousness of life that reminds us not to take life too seriously. There is nothing more sobering, or with any more universal impact on the human experience, than cancer. Almost everyone has lost someone to cancer, knows someone who has fought it, or has fought it themselves.

It is one thing to deal with cancer as an adult, but another thing altogether to face the realities of cancer as a child or the parent of a child who has been diagnosed with the disease. Special Love, an organization based out of Winchester, knows something about this and has made it their mission to help children with cancer enjoy the normal, fun things kids love. Specifically, Camp Fantastic, a week-long camp for kids with cancer or who have fought cancer in the last several years, gets children outdoors to play and goof off in a natural setting.

Special Love was founded in 1983 by Tom and Sheila Baker of Winchester. They had lost their daughter, Julie, a few years earlier to lymphoma, and wanted to do something to help children and their families who were going through difficulties similar to what they had faced, and were still facing. In 1983, Camp Fantastic welcomed 29 children for a week-long adventure that included canoeing, hiking, swimming, and other traditional camp experiences. Special Love now serves over 1,000 people annually with the help of hundreds of volunteers.

Dave Smith was a counselor at that initial Camp Fantastic and has



been Special Love's full-time director since 1987. "I was teaching nature and canoeing as a summer employee at the 4-H center when Camp Fantastic—and Special Love's subsequent programs—were developed," Dave says, "so I have a special appreciation for the therapeutic value of being in a natural environment, not just for young cancer patients but for any camp participant. The setting for our camps is a key component of our program agenda. Much of what we schedule is centered around the environment in which we hold the events—whether it's fishing in Lake Culpeper, hiking the Appalachian Trail, or hunting for 'creek critters' in the streams around Harmony Hollow."

Dave is quick to acknowledge the selfless help Special Love's programs receive from individual volunteers and organizations. Trout Unlimited (TU) is one of those organizations. TU has been instrumental in helping with Camp Fantastic and other Special Love programs for the past 12 to 15 years. "They are deeply committed to teaching the love of fishing and respect for the water to the kids and their parents," Dave acknowledges.

Lowane Johnson, of the Rapidan Chapter of TU, has been personally involved in helping with the Special Love programs since 1999. He and the rest of the TU volunteers take the kids out to seine streams and learn about entomology in the morning and then take them fishing in the afternoon. "Our goal," Lowane says, "is to provide the normal kid-type experiences for them. It's a lot of fun to see them get involved."

The healing that takes place in the rivers, streams, and on the banks of the ponds, is not just for the children, but for the families as well. Special Love learned early on that when one member of the family has cancer, the whole family has cancer. Perhaps more than anything, their programs let the children and their families know that they are not alone. What better way to do that than while wading in a stream or feeling the tug of a fish on the line? □

Tee Clarkson is an English teacher at Deep Run High School in Henrico Co. and runs Virginia Fishing Adventures, a fishing camp for kids: tsclarkson@virginiafishingadventures.com.

For more information

To contact Special Love, visit:
http://www.speciallove.org/.

Thanks to Dave Smith and Special Love for contributing these photographs.

The Learning Barge

Learning Barge docked at Portsmouth waterfront.

Floating Classroom Cultivates New Generation of River Conscious Citizens

"Public Access to natural areas inspires people to care, and caring people are more likely to act. It takes a marriage of heart and mind, but it comes first from the heart."

–Marjorie Mayfield Jackson,
Exec. Director, Elizabeth River Project

by Beth Hester

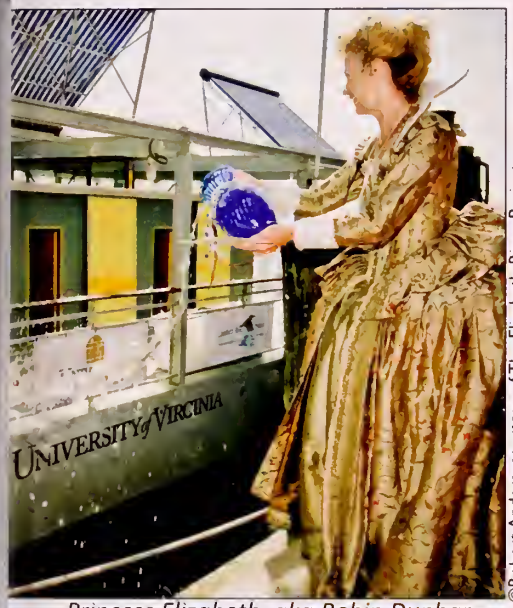
Launched on September 14th, 2009, The Learning Barge is an unusual vessel. She's an award-winning 120' x 32' steel-hulled, Coast Guard-certified floating classroom that traverses the waters of the Elizabeth River and lower Chesapeake Bay from April through November. Along the way, the barge is transported by tugboat and docked at various strategic points, affording thousands of Hampton Roads school children who might not otherwise have had access to the river, a unique opportunity to learn about alternative power, river stewardship, tidal ecosystems, and the importance of the various plants and animals that call the wetlands home.

Courtesy of The Elizabeth River Project

The barge is a self-sustaining educational environment, a mobile field station of sorts, crafted from recycled materials, and powered by solar or wind energy. In addition to an enclosed classroom and various learning stations, the vessel supports a contained-bed wetland that filters gray water and also creates habitat. No convenience has been overlooked, as the barge sports the latest in composting toilet technology and filtered rainwater hand washing stations. Once on board, students cycle through six learning stations, each with hands-on, experiential activities that include oyster floats, a seining pool, and the chance to get up close and personal with eels, turtles, fish, river otters, and other watershed creatures. Students learn about the roles native flora and fauna play in a healthy ecosystem, and are encouraged to envision their own relationship with the river, exploring simple things they can do to promote clean waterways.

In collaboration with the non-profit Elizabeth River Project (ERP), the barge was designed by students in the architecture department of the University of Virginia, and was partially funded through a combination of grants, and the generosity of corporate sponsors from around the state. Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, Executive Director of the ERP, described this synergy in a recent interview: *"The construction of the Learning Barge has been a many-faceted educational experience. In addition to our school children learning about environmental stewardship, the University of Virginia students learned more about green building methods, and they were able to actually help construct portions of the vessel…it is rare for those students to actually build what they design. In addition, the Virginia Ship Repair Association plans to use our barge for their apprentice training, and those students will help us maintain the barge going forward."*

The curriculum was developed by an advisory committee, including science coordinators from all four of Hampton Roads' school districts: Portsmouth, Norfolk, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach. The lesson plans and site-specific activities target grades 6-8, complement the Virginia Standards of Learning, and fill identified voids in existing instruction. The barge also supports teacher training and promotes public outreach. Robin Dunbar, aka Princess Elizabeth, is the



©Robert Anders, courtesy of The Elizabeth River Project

Princess Elizabeth, aka Robin Dunbar, brings the history of the river to life.

©Robert Anders, courtesy of The Elizabeth River Project

Learning stations provide students with access to river life through hands-on experiences, while fun can be had through more creative expression.

©Robert Anders, courtesy of The Elizabeth River Project

Creativity is the key to the learning process, as any smart fish decorator will tell you.

Elizabeth River Project's public outreach manager and is responsible for conducting a number of creative educational experiences and field trips for children. She can be found in full Elizabethan regalia sharing information about the history of the Elizabeth River, river stewardship, and native wetland plants.

Christie Sykes, an educator from Norfolk Collegiate, recently evaluated one of the field trips attended by their students: *"I've been teaching for a lot of years and I've been on a lot of field trips, but I've never been on a trip so engaging, fun, and educational. Every learning station was child-friendly, innovative, and informative. Thank you, thank you for providing our students with a learning experience that not only teaches them about the importance of keeping the Elizabeth River clean, but also about making a difference in our world."*

The Learning Barge, and the initiatives developed for it, are shining examples of what can be accomplished when seemingly disparate entities work toward the common goal of educating the next generation of Virginia's river-conscious citizens, who in turn will become the anglers, pleasure boaters, paddlers, gardeners, and wildlife watchers of the future. Teacher approval is a good gauge of the program's success, but perhaps students express it best in their own idiosyncratic language:

Dear Princess Elizabeth and crew. The field trip was awesome, and I was taught something of value, 'we must clean our world or it will be no more.' Now, I'm getting my parents to recycle and don't use too much fertilizer and rain is the only thing that should go down the drain. Also scoop the poop, because we have a big fat bulldog that eats three scoops of food three times a day. Also, I planted an acorn tree in our backyard. My mom will never go in the backyard again because she is terrified of squirrels.

Your friend, Aaron.

Now that's an endorsement! ☐

Beth Hester is a writer and freelance photographer from Portsmouth. Her passions include reading, shooting, kayaking, fishing, tying saltwater flies, and tending her herb garden.

Courtesy of The Elizabeth River Project

For Information

To learn more about the Elizabeth River Project's initiatives, and how you can help, visit their website: www.elizabethriver.org

Elizabeth River Project
475 Water Street, Suite 103A
Portsmouth, VA 23704-3823
Phone: 757-399-7487

©Robert Anders, courtesy of The Elizabeth River Project

Here and p. 26, students learn the importance of marsh vegetation.

Journal

2010 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on our website at www.HuntFishVA.com or call 804-367-7800.

July 20: *Flat Out Catfish I,* Pony Pasture, James River, Richmond.

July 29 & 31, August 5, 7, &10: *Flash Clinic: How to Use Your Camera's Flash,* with Lynda Richardson at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Call (804) 262-9887 X322 or go to www.lewisginter.org.

August 10: *Flat Out Catfish II,* Pony Pasture, James River, Richmond.

August 12, 14, 19, 21 & 24: *An Introduction to Photographing Butterflies and Other Cool Bugs,* with Lynda Richardson at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Call (804) 262-9887 X322 or go to www.lewisginter.org or www.lyndarichardsonphotography.com.

August 13–15: *Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show,* Richmond; www.sportsmanshow.com.

August 20–22: *Mother-Daughter Outdoors Weekend,* Holiday Lake 4-H Center, Appomattox.

August 28: *Jakes Event;* Page Valley Sportsman's Club; contact Art Kasson at (540) 622-6103 or artkasson@yahoo.com.

September 11:–12 *Eastern Regional Big Game Contest,* www.vpsa.org.

September 25: *Youth Deer Hunting Day,* (ages 15 and younger).

September 25–26: *Western Regional Big Game Contest and State Championship,* www.iwla-rh.org.

by Beth Hester

Catfishing in the South
by Jeff Samsel
Illustrated with black and white photographs
University of Tennessee Press
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"Cats have become an important sport fish on many rivers and lakes throughout the South, and they are finally being recognized for more than their frying-pan qualities, which, incidentally, are unrivaled in the minds of many anglers and non-anglers alike."

–Jeff Samsel

Crispy catfish fillets dredged in seasoned cornmeal have long graced many a southern fish-fry. These stout-bodied, freshwater creatures have a high caloric count, and for countless generations, through good economic times and bad, they've been an important source of protein for the family table.

But catfish don't have a lot of snob appeal, and the number of books written specifically for catfish anglers is small, indeed, when compared to titles devoted to trout or bass—though numerous angling surveys rank catfish among the most popular sport fish in the nation.

If you want to learn more about the history of catfishing, tackle tips, and techniques, and the best waters in the South from which to reel in your quarry, then Jeff Samsel's book should be in your fishing library. It covers the best catfishing areas all across the southeastern U.S., and the chapter focused on Virginia hotspots not only tells you where the fishing holes are, but describes their evolution, and what characteristics make these waters special and oh-so-attractive to Virginia's catfish populations.

The James and Rappahannock are considered to be world-class catfish destinations. Non-native blue catfish were introduced in the 1970s, and the population flourished. Multiple trophy-sized fish have been taken from these rivers. Two of the James' largest tributaries, the Appomattox and the Chickahominy, are home to both blue and channel catfish, and the James River boasts its share of flatheads. Other catfish waters of note include: Claytor and Kerr lakes, the New River, and the Occoquan Reservoir.

To help you enjoy the fish you decide to keep, the book offers twelve delicious ways to serve up your catfish via stew, gumbo, casserole, pan, or grill. You'll want to get yourself a tall glass of sweet tea with lemon, prop open this book, and dream of your next catfishin' destination. □

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Kudos to Mr. Brooks Lindamood for capturing this magnificent image of an American woodcock while morel hunting. The American woodcock (Scolopax minor) *is found statewide but in the western counties only during breeding season. A shorebird that is also at home in upland reaches, the woodcock is a prodigious consumer of earthworms and also diets on insects, larvae, and assorted sedges. During spring, the bird uses areas of mixed hardwoods and pines for singing grounds and nesting. It favors wetter areas with trees such as alder, dogwood, and crab apple during summer but scavenges dry fields for insects.*

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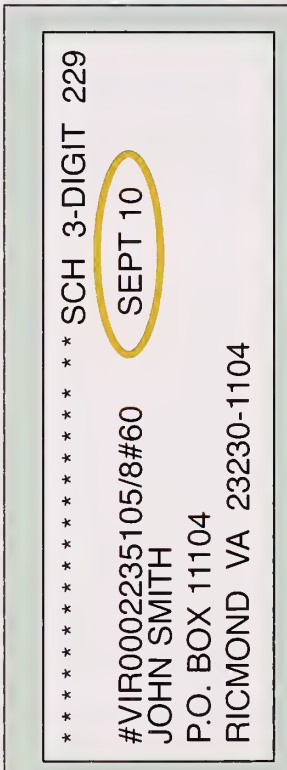

Reading Your Label

Is it time to renew? If you are uncertain when your subscription expires, look for the expiration date in the location circled on the sample above.

Outdoor Kids

Congratulations to Hunter Raso (9) and Hannah Raso (6) for their great skills in landing a bluegill during a fishing trip to a friend's pond last fall. As you can see, they are pretty miserable about the entire adventure. Just kidding—and thanks for sharing.

We are pleased to share here the winning essay in the VOWA 2009 Youth Writing Competition, Collegiate Undergraduate Division.

Fairy Dust

by John P. Haworth

I recall the salt on my skin, deposited by the humid air. It was that time of year when the clouds would form astronomical kingdoms in the sky as they mixed with the blood of the dying sun. We were headed for the *USS Tiger*. A simple wreck if you knew your way around a junkyard. Getting to the *Tiger* wasn't a long voyage—especially on such a sublime summer evening coupled with the speed of the *Miss Lauren*.

I envy myself as I recall this night. I long for a deep breath of an ocean breeze while in these mountains.

Night dives were always a thrill, especially with lobster on the menu. My brother, who was a former captain aboard the *Lauren*, decided to join me. As soon as we were able to enter the water, we began our descent into the abyss. My pupils dilated and absorbed as much light as they could, which was only what my battery-powered light provided me. To my left, my rear, and my right there was only blackness.

As we descended upon the *USS Tiger*, our lights reflected the red rust and army green of the Atlantic shipwreck. Lobster antennas towered out of cracks in the iron. Within minutes we each possessed a lobster in our catch bag. Moving to the edge of the wreckage, while peering across the sea floor, my lantern caught an eerie sight. Like a caravan of ghosts, a school of flounder shook themselves out of their graves and began a quiet wander toward the *Tiger*. They were on the move, on the hunt. My fists began to clench around my pole spear with great angst. I gave a small flutter and began my stalk. Their colors began to camouflage into an auburn brown as they hovered onto the wreck. In the corner of my eye, an enormous flounder appeared and I began to shadow his movements. His eyes darted in confusion as my light approached.

My imagination stirred and I began to hear the faint sizzling of oil in a pan. In my mind I anxiously grabbed thick cuts of fish, sprinkled them with batter and of course Old Bay, and dipped them into the hot oil. I began to drool onto my mother's tile floor and then I realized the drool was currently filling my regulator. I could taste his ability to cure my hunger along with a basket of fries. The time was now and I began to push back my spear until I noticed something was terribly wrong.

With a small laugh I realized the spear was still resting in my garage at home. In my excitement and blood thirst, I had forgotten my earlier decision to leave it behind and merely dreamed it present in hopes of catching dinner. Predator and predator exchanged eyes one last time as I passed the colossal escapee. I imagined him laughing at me, with a deep baritone voice echoing from the deep chambers of his old, yet wild, heart.

After checking our air, my brother and I decided to begin our ascent. As we inched our way to the surface, we extinguished our lights in hopes of glimpsing a familiar sight: tiny creatures that flicker a pulse of phosphorous light at the slightest touch. I shook the anchor line, causing all the creatures resting on it to emit a flurry of green light—providing me with a glowing trail that led all the way to the surface. I noticed there was a considerable amount this evening, more than I had ever seen. I gazed around and my heart seized with everything around me as I witnessed an electrifying spectacle. As if I were a giant in a galaxy of stars, these little creatures, so critical to the sea, surrounded me in astonishing numbers. The darkness was fading as a blanket of fairy dust draped over me. I gazed down at my hand. I curled my fingers back and forth toward my palm, gazing in awe. It appeared as if I had just been given supernatural powers. I could only see what appeared to be a human hand surging with green light. My eyes moved from my wrist to my elbow, then shoulder, then chest, and then to my whole body. I could not make out the human stitching or worldly logos of my gear; nothing. Only a vibrant display of electric greens, a collection of fairy dust in the exact shape of my body. And in this world where gravity counted for less, I was floating. As if I belonged on a torn-out page of *Peter Pan*, the fairy dust began to give me flight. I was a terrestrial being, endowed with a supernatural ability to fly in the aquatic atmosphere.

Slowly I began to hear drums coming from somewhere in the dark. I looked up and a lightning bolt's flash dispersed through the ripples of the surface. I began to notice the current had shifted: a sure sign it was time to go, along with the lightning bolt. In admiration, yet sorrow, I watched the impenetrable green blanket unfold from around my body, shifting back into the form of a galaxy, which then spread back into the infinite universe of the deep. My time in euphoria was over. With a deep breath of dry air from my artificial gills, I looked back toward the surface and began my return to earth.

Whether it be as a biologist or a simple fisherman, my sails will always be set toward the horizon of the sea. Though but one among many interactions with the ocean, my experience on the night dive of the *USS Tiger* was by far the most mesmerizing. I intruded into a world which was not my own, where I was at the complete mercy of the sea. Yet in my intrusion, under the comfort of a glowing blanket, I felt at home and welcomed. I know this experience only happens to so many people and but so often, and for this I shall remain in the sea's debt forever.

Congratulations to John Haworth, a fisheries science major at Virginia Tech. The annual Youth Writing Competition is sponsored by the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association, Inc.

"Sorry to call you back from your vacation on such short notice, Smith."

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Depth-of-Field Preview Button

Most of the time I totally forget about the depth-of-field preview feature on my camera. It is a button normally found on the front of the camera, and when pressed shows you what's in focus. It does this by "stopping down" the lens to the aperture you have selected. Not every camera has this feature, so be sure to check your camera manual to see if yours does.

A lot of times this function does not seem to do any good at all. If using a small aperture setting like f22.0, which gives a maximum depth-of-field, initially all you will see is a dark scene—making it difficult to see much of anything. On the other hand, if you use a large aperture opening like f2.8, a minimum depth-of-field, then it is bright enough to see plenty but doesn't appear to show you much. How can you make this feature work for you?

As you may recall in the May *Photo Tips* column, the aperture of your lens controls how much is in focus in front of and behind your subject by a 1/3 to 2/3 ratio. When trying to decide on how much you want in focus, sometimes you can preview an aperture by selecting it and then pushing in and holding the depth-of-field preview button. If it appears too dark, just wait a little while until your eye gets adjusted. Then, look around the frame to see how much is in focus.

Another thing to do is simply change the aperture and compare again how everything looks with the button pushed in. If I first tried f22.0, then I might try f8.0 and then even f2.8. You will see a difference when comparing in this way, despite the brightness or darkness of the scene. Differences are particularly obvious when you have a distant background behind the subject. And, if all else fails, just take pictures of the different aperture settings and see what you like on the LCD or the computer screen later.

The depth-of-field button is particularly helpful when looking for distracting elements at maximum depth-of-field settings. The preview can expose an errant stick or blade of grass that you can correct before taking the shot. It will also reveal other distractions, such as spots of light behind foliage, or a subject's head, or even a dark shape you hadn't noticed before.

The next time you experiment with depth-of-field don't be afraid to try out the depth-of-field preview button. I'm going to remember to use it more myself! □

The depth-of-field preview button might be hiding somewhere on your camera! Here, it's the small black button near the lens and the bottom of the camera. Be sure to check your manual to see if you have this feature.

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

Image of the Month

Congratulations go to Nancy Newman of Charlottesville for her fun image of a tiger swallowtail caterpillar as seen under a magnifying glass. Nancy reports that she goes "caterpillaring" with friends and this was one of their many finds. Nikon Coolpix L1 digital camera, ISO 50, 1/80th, f2.9. Very cool!

On The Water

by Tom Guess

This is the Sailing Vessel FOR SAIL!

I was fairly new to the Coast Guard and happened to be on radio watch. Radio watch is very similar to standing duty as a dispatcher, because you are certified through a qualification process to monitor the radios and phones found in a Coast Guard communications center and respond to MAYDAY calls or calls for assistance.

This particular summer morning was one when you just knew it was going to be a hot and stagnant day with no breeze in the air. I remember my supervisor saying, "Sure is a quiet day today!" to which I replied, "So far, but it's been a while since we've had anything bad happen!"

Boat U.S. Foundation

Shortly after that I remember the microphone keying up on VHF-FM channel 16, followed by what sounded like wind blowing and someone panting or breathing heavily, "MAYDAY – MAYDAY – MAYDAY – this is the 37-foot white and blue sailing vessel FOR SAIL... FOR SAIL. We have two persons on board and our boat is engulfed in flames! We need help fast! Our position is..." and then I heard what you always fear on the other end—silence.

I called out via channel 16, "Sailing vessel FOR SAIL, this is the U.S. Coast Guard. Over." I repeated this several times, with no reply. I started an "urgent marine broadcast" while our boat was en route to the position, "PAN-PAN, PAN-PAN, PAN-PAN (pronounced pahn). Hello all stations. Anyone hearing a distress call on VHF-FM channel 16 for the sailing vessel FOR SAIL on fire in the vicinity of... please keep a sharp eye out and report any sightings to the nearest Coast Guard unit."

Soon I received another transmission, "Coast Guard, this is the FOR SAIL. My dad and I are in our dinghy and have paddled away from our sailing vessel and have anchored near the marsh. Our vessel is a total loss and fully engulfed."

As it turns out, these two men were fueling a gas camp stove on the back deck of their boat. When they returned the stove to the galley/salon area to cook breakfast, some spilled fuel ignited. This in turn ignited the curtains over the port light window, which caused the fire to spread rapidly throughout the galley and lower cabin. The operator told us that he used three hand-held fire extinguishers that were on board with no success and that they didn't seem to work very well because they didn't last long.

Vessels with enclosed fuel tanks, inboard motors, and decks that can trap fuel vapors (including jonboats with installed wooden decks and gas motors), or vessels with a galley and/or berthing area (sleeping quarters or cabin) must carry approved fire extinguisher(s). Your fire extinguisher must be a U.S. Coast Guard-approved B- or B/C-type extinguisher, and the proper size and number for your boat. Boats less than 26 feet in length with enclosed fuel, engine compartment, or other construction that could trap fuel vapors would be required to carry one B-1, USCG-approved, marine grade fire extinguisher on board. The extinguisher should be good and serviceable, charged, and stowed in a readily accessible location. For more information on fire extinguishers, visit the *Watercraft Owner's Guide* section of our website at: www.dgif.virginia.gov/boating/wog/equipment-regulations.asp#Fire_Extinguishers.

Remember that the operator of the FOR SAIL stated that his extinguishers didn't work for long. As a rule, the charge in a hand-held portable fire extinguisher will only last in seconds equal to its weight. For example, a 2- to 3-pound portable extinguisher will provide you with a mere 2 or 3 seconds of firefighting capability. Typical B-1, USCG-approved fire extinguishers are widely available at local retailers for around $25 or less.

Remember, when you're on the water: Be Responsible, Be Safe, and Have Fun! □

Tom Guess, U. S. Coast Guard (Ret.), serves as a statewide coordinator for the Boating Safety Education Program at the DGIF.

Dining In

by Ken and Maria Perrotte

King George's Venison Chili

We've been to a number of chili cook-offs in our day, even entering a few and enjoying some modest success. From all-meat chili to chili with beans to chicken chili to the most disappointing chili we tried to make using the pungent meat from a rutting caribou stag, we've prepared, enjoyed, and endured the best to the worst.

Certainly, one of the finest chili dishes we ever had was prepared by California-based wild game chef Scott Leysath, who took a couple of moose roasts Ken brought to an outdoor writers conference and proceeded to turn them into something savored by the masses sampling the treats around the buffet table.

It's always interesting how some folks equate good chili to the level of heat generated by whatever peppers or spices are in the mix. There's spicy, there's hot, and there's ridiculous.

About the only chili concoctions we don't care for are those efforts designed by seemingly sadistic cooks. Perhaps you've tried them—the ones that seek to sear all taste buds with overdoses of hot peppers and other ingredients. They peg out at the top of the culinary misery index. Victims with terrified eyes, tingling hair, and sweating brows gasp for cold liquids or anything that will quell the inferno.

Like many of our dishes, we adopt a technique here, an ingredient there, and keep sampling until it suits our tastebuds. This chili recipe is such an amalgamation. It adapts a cooking technique we saw on a cooking show that involves simmering the meat in the liquid versus first browning in a pan with seasonings that offer just the right amount of tanginess and flavor.

This is what most would consider a mild chili. The combination of cinnamon and brown sugar gives it a sweet, somewhat exotic flavor, while vinegar provides a bit of tang. It's easy to add more traditional chili zip in the way of cumin or more chili powder, or fresh chopped hot peppers to get it to a point, if desired. This cooking technique, though, makes it easy to fool yourself into thinking the chili is too mild when it first starts cooking. Let it cook down and reduce in terms of liquid before adding additional hot peppers, cumin, or other fiery ingredients.

Ingredients

- 2 ½ tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 scallions, chopped
- ¼ green pepper, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tomato (fresh or canned, chopped)
- 3 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 teaspoons oregano
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon allspice
- ½ teaspoon each, salt and pepper, or to taste
- 28 ounce can diced tomatoes
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 ½ tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 2 pounds ground venison

Cooking

Sauté vegetables in oil over medium/low heat until soft. Add seasonings and cook another minute. Add diced tomatoes, broth, sugar and vinegar, and bring to a simmer. Add meat, breaking it apart as it comes to a simmer. Cook uncovered for about 15 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add more peppers or cumin or chili powder to increase the heat to your desired level.

Serve

While you can just eat it out of a bowl with crackers or a nice honeyed cornbread, this chili does very well served "Cincinnati style" over spaghetti. You can add chopped onions, grated or shredded cheese, and pinto, kidney, or black beans over the top as your style and taste suits. This chili can be satisfying year-round. It matches well with most medium-bodied lager beers or a light ale. □

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Aaron Smith from Shenandoah Valley is checking his target at the Hunter Education Challenge held recently at Holiday Lake 4-H Center. Hunter Education Instructor Shay Bolen is scoring. The challenge draws 100+ participants from across Virginia each year to compete in events "aimed" at encouraging graduates of the hunter education course to develop their skills. This year's senior division team winner, Powhatan County, will now compete in the national event.

The Old Dominion Smallmouth Club has completed a project to fund and build 15 fishing line recycling bins. These bins are being installed at boat ramps on the James River above Richmond. The Old Dominion Smallmouth Club will empty the bins periodically and forward discarded line to Berkley for recycling.

Discarded monofilament line is one of the most dangerous trash items encountered by wildlife. Birds collect it for nesting material, creating hazards—including entanglement—to themselves and their offspring. Many nests contain monofilament and/or plastic that has been scavenged.

Club members encourage you to collect any line that you find in the course of your river trip and recycle it in these bins.

We wish to thank the Old Dominion Smallmouth Club (ODSC) for speorheading this importont project that protects wildlife. Report ond photograph, courtesy of ODSC.

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